United Nations ST/IC/1999/55

Secretariat

27 July 1999

Information circular*

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **2000 competitive examination for promotion to the Professional category of staff members from other categories**

1. The purpose of the present circular is to provide information to staff members in the General Service and related categories of the Secretariat who wish to take the 2000 competitive examination for promotion to the Professional category, in accordance with the provisions of administrative instruction ST/AI/1998/8 of 13 August 1998.

2. The 2000 competitive examination for promotion to the Professional category is scheduled to be held from 7 to 11 February 2000 (written component) and in June/July 2000 (oral component). The final schedule, the occupational groups selected and the application form will be provided in an addendum to the present information circular.

Eligibility

3. A staff member serving in the General Service and related categories, including the Field Service category up to and including the FS-5 level, may apply to take a competitive examination in a particular occupational group, provided that he or she:

(a) Has a minimum of five years' continuous service in the Secretariat by 31 December 1999, excluding any service in separately administered funds or programmes, except as otherwise provided in paragraph 4 below;

(b) Has a satisfactory record of performance;

(c) Holds a United Nations letter of appointment valid at least until 31 August 2000;

(d) Meets the minimum eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 5 to 8 of the present information circular.

4. Short breaks in service may be allowed at the discretion of the Central Examinations Board. Staff members who had previously served continuously for at least five years with the United Nations Secretariat, had resigned and, by 31 December of 1999, would have

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served continuously for at least three years since their reappointment will also be considered eligible, provided that they meet the other requirements.

Minimum eligibility criteria

5. Staff members are invited to apply for one of the occupational groups in which the examination is to be held in 2000. The minimum eligibility criterion is a first-level university degree, equivalent to a bachelor's degree, broadly related to the occupational group for which the candidate has applied. Staff members who have a degree or degrees broadly related to two occupational groups offered in 2000 may apply to take the examination in each of these two occupational groups.

6. Staff members who have served in the Secretariat for at least five years by 31 December 1989 will be allowed to take the examination in any one of the occupational groups in which the examination is held in 2000, upon providing evidence of post-secondary academic qualifications. Should such staff members hold a first-level university degree or degrees broadly related to the occupational groups offered in 2000, they may apply to take the examination in a second occupational group to which their degree is broadly related.

7. Staff members shall provide relevant documents, as required, as evidence in support of their meeting the minimum eligibility criteria described in this section and the eligibility requirements listed in paragraph 3.

8. In view of the request to the Secretary-General contained in paragraph 22 of section V of General Assembly resolution 53/221 of 7 April 1999, all eligible candidates will be allowed to take the examination, but the results of the examination, including the marking of the papers of nationals of over-represented countries, will be subject to the outcome of the review of the issue by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

Applications

9. Staff members who wish to submit an application shall complete the application form annexed to the addendum to the present information circular and submit it with all required documentation to the Central Examinations Board by 31 October 1999. The staff member's most recent performance report must also be submitted with the application.

Format and substance of the examination

A. Written examination

10. The written examination accounts for 80 per cent of the total number of points available for each occupational group and consists of two parts: a general paper (four hours) and a specialized paper (four hours) related to the occupational group concerned.

11. Part I, the general paper, consists of three sections with a total coefficient of 30 per cent:

(a) Section 1 will test the candidate's ability to analyse a problem. The section consists of a text and questions based on the text. The time recommended for this section is 1 hour and 20 minutes and it has a coefficient of 10 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination;

(b) Section 2 consists of a text of a speech or a report. Candidates will be asked to summarize the text, reducing it to approximately one third of its length. The summary will be evaluated for comprehension, accuracy and clarity of thought. The time recommended for this section is 1 hour and 20 minutes and it has a coefficient of 10 percent of the marks assigned to the examination;

(c) Section 3 tests the candidate's knowledge of international relations. Candidates may choose to answer any 10 among 12 questions offered. The time recommended for this section is 1 hour and 20 minutes and it has a coefficient of 10 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination.

12. Part II, the specialized paper, which tests the candidate's substantive knowledge of the occupational group concerned, normally consists of 3 essay-type exercises and 10 short-answer type questions. All essays and questions are mandatory. The total time recommended for this part is 4 hours and it has a coefficient of 50 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination.

13. Some candidates may be required to sit for a special language test as stated in ST/AI/1998/8. This test consists of two parts covering, respectively, reading and writing abilities. The duration of the test is 2 hours and 30 minutes. Candidates who have not demonstrated proficiency in one of the working languages of the Secretariat (English or French) in the special language test or in the drafting test will be considered as not having met the standard required in the examination.

B. Oral examination

14. Candidates may be convoked for an oral examination in accordance with administrative instruction ST/AI/1998/8. Candidates serving at duty stations away from Headquarters will take this part of the examination either in New York or at another location, depending on circumstances. At locations away from Headquarters, the oral examination will be conducted by a board consisting of at least three members of the relevant board of examiners, including an ex officio member.

15. The oral examination will consist of two separate exercises: an oral presentation and a group exercise. The oral examination will constitute 20 per cent of the marks of the examination process. The oral presentation, designed to evaluate the candidates' ability to communicate and convey their views in a clear, understandable and concise way, will account for 8 per cent of the points assigned to the examination, and the group exercise will account for 12 per cent of those points. The four performance dimensions measured by the group exercise, initiative, adaptability, negotiating skills and potential for leadership, will each account for 3 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination.

16. Candidates may make the individual oral presentation in English, in French or in one of the official languages of the regional commissions other than English or French. In the group exercise, candidates must converse in either English or French. Language will be taken into consideration when constituting groups for the group exercise.

Oral presentation

17. For all occupational groups, the standardized format of the oral presentation will include a 10-minute presentation of a general nature on a topic broadly related to the occupational group concerned. Each candidate will draw two topics at random from a selection prepared in advance and choose one of the topics. The candidate will then have 15 minutes to prepare an oral presentation on the selected topic. Following the presentation, the Board of Examiners will have an opportunity to ask three questions for clarification or amplification of any of the points made by the candidate. After the presentation and related questions, the Board will ask five other questions of a general nature, also broadly related to the occupation, and two questions for clarification or amplification of any points made during the five additional questions.

18. The presentation and responses to questions of the oral presentation will be evaluated in accordance with a rating scale designed to assess the candidates' ability to comprehend topics and questions, to communicate with others and to present and illustrate with examples his or her views in a clear, logical and understandable way. In order to ensure consistency, the marking will be done separately by each member of the board immediately after each oral presentation and without relation to the grading of the written examination.

Group exercise

19. The group exercise is a leaderless group, non-assigned role exercise. As designed for the oral examination, it will measure the performance dimensions of initiative, adaptability, negotiating skills and potential for leadership. Candidates will be assigned to groups ranging in size from three to six members. Groups may be constituted of candidates drawn from one or several occupational groups. If a candidate is convoked to the oral examination for two occupational groups, scores obtained in the group exercise portion of the oral examination will be applied to both occupational groups.

20. The group exercise is a problem-solving exercise in which a scenario describing a series of problems is presented to the group. The group is allowed a specified length of time to analyse and discuss the problems. The members must arrive at a solution to each problem presented in the exercise as a group, through group discussion. Once the solutions have been reached, depending upon the specific requirements of the exercise, a presentation/ discussion/report will be generated to be presented to the board members.

21. Candidates participating in the group exercise will be evaluated by a special board consisting of members who have received training in the group exercise methodology. The training will focus on teaching the members to identify, observe, assess, rate and record specific behaviours related to the above-mentioned performance dimensions. During the group exercise, the board members will observe each group member's behaviour relative to the performance dimensions and take notes on each candidate's behaviour. Upon completion of the exercise, the board members will rate, on predetermined scales, each candidate's behaviour according to the appropriate performance dimensions. The board members will discuss their ratings and, where discrepancies in rating occur, will reconcile ratings. After reconciliation takes place, a total score will be calculated on the basis of the reconciled ratings.

22. This information circular supersedes information circular ST/IC/1998/61 of 9 September 1998.